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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement submitted by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), in general consultative status with ECOSOC, recognises that war and conflict disproportionately affect women and girls and that violence against women is systematic, extreme and widespread in situations of conflict and war.

Respect for diversity and gender equality are crucial to understanding the root causes of conflict and subsequently for addressing conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building.

Civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and are increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements. Even after the declaration of peace, women remain threatened by militarization and the culture of violence, which persists in post-conflict situations. Due to the realities of violent conflict, there are very few mechanisms in place to protect women and girls caught up in conflict. It is thus even more imperative to halt conflicts and to strengthen conflict prevention and peace building.

In light of the way in which conflict and war impact on women and girls, WAGGGS stresses the need to strike a balance between on the one hand, responding to women and girls as victims during and following armed conflict and on the other hand, ensuring women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict, peace negotiations, reconciliation and reconstruction for the development of sustainable peace (women as agents of change).

Children's rights, especially the rights of girls, are often disregarded in times of conflict — whether it is conflict at home, in the community or armed conflict between nations. This amounts to exclusion, with the implication being that, as children are perceived to have nothing to offer by way of a solution, they need not be consulted or informed in any way. This exclusion has a direct impact in terms of rights lost but also an indirect impact in terms of what children learn about responsible behaviour.[1]

As Peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women, lasting peace cannot be established without the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in the peace process. There is an urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into the peacekeeping processes.

An understanding of the impact of conflict on women and girls as well as effective arrangements to guarantee protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to promotion and maintenance of international peace and security.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security," which was adopted in October 2000, clearly stresses "the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."

[1] Our Rights, Our Responsibilities, WAGGGS Call to Action 2002-2008: The Right to Live in Peace, page 7.

How WAGGGS is addressing "The Right to live in Peace":

The World Association provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop confidence, leadership and life skills. Through WAGGGS, girls and young women are given unique opportunities — in leadership, in global citizenship, in international travel and intercultural learning.

Key aspects of WAGGGS' non-formal education methods include learning by doing, volunteerism, and peer education. For instance, through its Building Peace Among Children project, WAGGGS has trained young women from countries affected by conflict in Africa to be volunteer peace ambassadors among their peers.[2]

WAGGGS' theme from 2002 to 2008 is "Our Rights, Our Responsibilities." Human rights issues, such as 'The Right to live in Peace,' are explored particularly as relates to young people as part of the global community.

Under the "Our Rights, Our Responsibilities" theme, WAGGGS has produced Activity Packs for individual members and Member Organizations to explore the area of human rights. The packs, which include a module provided by UNICEF, contain an introduction on how each right is linked with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The packs provide ideas for discussions and activities.[3]

Most of the 144 Member Organisations of WAGGGS have conducted educational projects and programmes on 'The Right to live in Peace.'

WAGGGS is also involved in international peace projects. A recent major success was the Amahoro Amani project, which promotes peace in Africa, a joint project of WAGGGS and the World Organisation of the Scout Movement (WOSM). The Amahoro Amani project was set up to engage several thousands of young people in combating ethnic prejudice and to inspire them to make a real contribution to social change in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. It has involved seven Guide and Scout Associations in Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Guides and Scouts have been carrying out many practical activities including setting up peace and reconciliation clubs for young people from different ethnic backgrounds and organizing peace and reconciliation days.

WAGGGS calls national governments to take stronger action to implement the provisions of the human rights conventions and fulfil their promises to the children of the world by:

- Advocating for development of policies, implementation of programmes, and social action to improve the inclusion of women in decision making processes, in conflict prevention, management and resolutions as well as in post-conflict peace-building
- Supporting the full participation of women in all decision-making bodies and processes that affect the political, economic, social, educational and health concerns of society as a whole
- Implementing speedily and fully UN Security Council Resolution 1325

[2] WAGGGS position statement, Education, 2007.

[3] WAGGGS position statement, Human Rights, 2007.

- Ensuring equal participation of women in all stages of conflict prevention and peace negotiations and reconciliation processes, analysis, and policy making as they represent one half of the human society
- Ensuring that sufficient additional resources are allocated to support conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building

WAGGGS calls on the international community to:

- Draw on the expertise of women's organisations to carry out further research on the impact of conflict on girls and women as well as the role and the possibilities of integration of women in conflict prevention, peace-building processes and conflict resolution
- Promote gender equality and safeguard women's human rights and their political, social and economic rights in all policies
- Support strongly local women's peace initiatives as well as women's organisations involved in conflict prevention and resolution and in post-conflict peace building

WAGGGS urges national governments and the international community to:

- Ensure full implementation of international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and children during and after conflicts
- Address the roots of conflicts such as "gender-related" violations including rape, trafficking and military-related prostitution as well as social injustice
- Appeal to all actors involved in conflict prevention, management and resolution to adopt a gender perspective, including the special needs of women and girls in all parts of the process
- Include education — formal as well as non-formal — and economical empowerment of girls and women in all post-war programmes
- Eliminate gender discrimination, including through the promotion of educational programmes that challenge traditional attitudes of men and boys toward women and girls in post-conflict situations
- Allocate sufficient public funds for relevant children's services and support
- Support organizations involved in the promotion of peace education of girls and young women
- Recognise non-formal education as a positive method of peace education